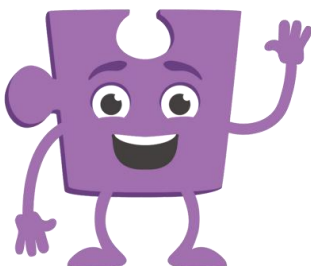


RELATIONSHIPS, SEX AND HEALTH EDUCATION: WHAT DO PRIMARY SCHOOLS HAVE TO TEACH?

**A guide for subject leaders and
teachers for schools in England, in
relation to the DfE's July 2025
Guidance**

February 2026



Introduction: RSHE within the broader curriculum

This overview should be read alongside the full programme materials and the DfE's Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory Guidance (July 2025).

Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) does not exist in isolation. It forms a vital part of a school's wider curriculum offer, sitting naturally within Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) and contributing significantly to every school's Personal Development expectations.

Effective RSHE supports children to:

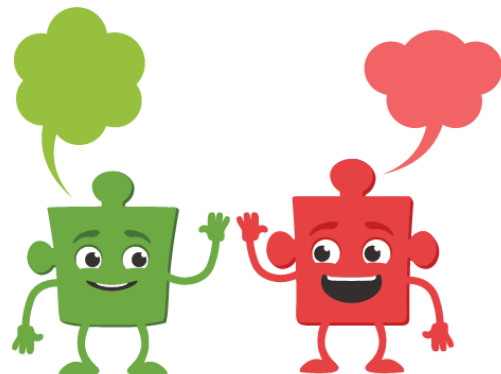
- Develop the knowledge and skills they need to keep themselves safe
- Build positive, healthy relationships with family, friends and the wider community
- Understand their own physical and emotional development
- Make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing
- Prepare for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life

This learning about themselves and the world around them is essential. It underpins children's ability to achieve their goals, stay safe, navigate challenges and thrive – both now and as they grow into adulthood.

Ofsted's inspection framework recognises this, with RSHE contributing to judgements about pupils' personal development, behaviour, welfare, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

There are three distinct strands. One of the most common sources of confusion is the interchangeable use of terms. These are:

- **Relationships Education**
- **Health Education**
- **Sex Education**



<u>Relationships Education</u>	Statutory. No parental right to withdraw
What it is:	Teaching children about the building blocks of positive, healthy relationships – with family, friends, peers and others. It covers topics including families, friendships, respect, boundaries, conflict resolution, online safety and recognising when relationships are unhealthy or unsafe.
What it is NOT:	Relationships Education does not involve teaching children about sexual activity. It can, and should, address sensitive safeguarding topics (such as recognising abuse or inappropriate online contact) without describing intimate physical relationships that are not age appropriate.
Parental withdrawal:	Parents do NOT have the right to withdraw their children from Relationships Education as it is statutory content at primary.

<u>Health Education</u>	Statutory. No parental right to withdraw
What it is:	Teaching children to make good decisions about their own health and wellbeing. Includes physical health (including changing adolescent body and puberty), mental wellbeing, healthy eating, drugs/alcohol/tobacco awareness, basic first aid, online wellbeing and personal safety.
Puberty sits here	The 2025 DfE guidance is clear that teaching about puberty (including the physical and emotional changes that occur during adolescence, menstruation, and the correct names for body parts) is part of Health Education.
Parental withdrawal:	Parents do NOT have the right to withdraw their children from Relationships Education as it is statutory content at primary.

Sex Education	Non-statutory. Parental right to withdraw when taught as part of PSHE/RSHE.
What it is:	<p>In the primary context, Sex Education means teaching about human reproduction – specifically, what happens in order for babies to be conceived and born.</p> <p>Although sex education is not compulsory in primary schools, the DfE recommends that primary schools teach Sex Education in Years 5 and/or 6, aligned with the National Curriculum for Science content on reproduction.</p> <p>Jigsaw PSHE considers this content to be in 2 lessons in the programme: one in Year 5 and one in Year 6.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ages 9-10, Changing Me, Piece 4 – Conception • Ages 10-11, Changing Me, Piece 3 – Babies: Conception to Birth
What it is NOT	Sex Education does not include puberty (which is statutory Health Education) or teaching about families and relationships (which is Relationships Education).
Parental withdrawal:	<p>Parents do have the right to withdraw their children from Sex Education within RSHE</p> <p><i>See more detailed explanation on parental right to withdraw from RSHE or Science on page 6.</i></p>

Sensitive and often misunderstood areas

Different types of families

Where this sits: Relationships Education (statutory, no withdrawal).

The 2025 guidance states that schools should illustrate "a wide range of family structures in a positive way" and take care to ensure children are not stigmatised based on their home circumstances.

This includes single-parent families, same-sex parents, families living with grandparents, blended families, kinship carers, adoptive parents, foster families and other arrangements.

Jigsaw's approach: Different family compositions are represented naturally throughout the programme – in images, stories and discussion prompts – reflecting our communities, society and laws. This allows children to see their own families represented, understand healthy family relationships, and feel that all families are valued. Children also have opportunities to share their own experiences, thoughts and feelings, helping them process their ideas while allowing peers to hear different perspectives, reinforcing how we are all different and similar too.

LGBT

Where this sits: Relationships Education (statutory, no withdrawal).

Relationships:

The 2025 guidance "strongly encourages" primary schools to teach about healthy loving relationships and include same-sex parents alongside other family arrangements when discussing families. Schools must comply with the Equality Act 2010, under which sexual orientation is a protected characteristic.

Jigsaw's approach:

Same-sex relationships are represented in lessons about families from Reception onwards, presented as one of many types of loving family. The terms 'gay' and 'heterosexual' are introduced from Year 3 in the context of who adults love and may choose to spend their lives with, and in lessons about bullying, where topics of difference are explored. These terms are not taught in the context of sexual activity. This approach values and includes all children and all family compositions.

Gender identity

The 2025 guidance takes a cautious approach to this area. By the end of **secondary** school, schools should teach the facts and the law about biological sex and gender reassignment, recognising that people with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment should be treated with respect and dignity, **but there is no expectation included in the guidance that this should be explicitly taught in primary schools.**

With this in mind, schools should:

- Be mindful that beyond the facts and law, there is significant debate

- Not teach contested views as fact (e.g. not teach as fact that all people have a gender identity)
- Avoid language and activities that reinforce gender stereotypes
- Avoid any suggestion that social transition is a simple solution to distress
- Consult parents on external resources and make all materials available on request

Jigsaw's approach: Jigsaw's philosophy values every child as a unique human being. The primary PSHE programme focuses on celebrating difference and challenging stereotypes. Specific terminology relating to gender identity is not introduced at primary level. There are opportunities for teachers to address questions sensitively if they arise, and to support and value the families of pupils who may include transgender or gender questioning individuals, but this is at the school's discretion and in line with their policy. At no point does Jigsaw relay a 'wrong body' narrative.

Puberty and the changing body

Where this sits: Health Education (statutory, no withdrawal).

This is Health Education, not Sex Education. This distinction matters because parents cannot withdraw children from Health Education.

Puberty content includes:

- How bodies grow and change during adolescence
- The menstrual cycle and periods (including period products)
- Physical changes for boys and girls
- Emotional changes during puberty
- Personal hygiene
- Correct terminology for body parts

The DfE guidance notes that although the average age for periods to begin is 12, they can start as early as 8 so it is important that schools cover this topic before girls' periods start to so that they understand what to expect and have time to ask questions before menstruation begins. In order to do this, children will also need to know the correct names of body parts and understand who they can go to for reliable information and support.



Sex Education: Conception and birth

If schools choose to teach Sex Education, this should cover how babies are conceived (through sexual intercourse), how pregnancy develops and how a baby is born. The DfE recommends this is taught in Years 5 and/or 6.

Where this sits:

Schools have a choice about whether to teach this content within Science or PSHE

- **Within Science:** Parents cannot request withdrawal (when humans are chosen as the example when teaching the National Curriculum statutory content about reproduction in mammals).
- **Within PSHE:** Parents can request withdrawal. Schools should consult parents about the content of Sex Education and support them in talking to their children about these topics at home.

Within Science: Teaching focuses on the biological facts of reproduction. Parents cannot request withdrawal when humans are chosen as the example for the National Curriculum statutory content about reproduction in mammals.

Within PSHE: Teaching can place reproduction within a broader context of relationships, family life and emotional readiness. This allows for age-appropriate discussions about consent, respect, and how to ask questions safely. It also enables teachers to address children's curiosities sensitively and supports parents in continuing these conversations at home. Parents can request withdrawal from Sex Education taught within PSHE, and schools should consult parents about the content and support them in talking to their children about these topics.

Your policy and documents need to reflect your approach clearly so that staff, governors and parents can clearly understand how this is taught.



How Jigsaw PSHE 3-11 Supports Statutory RSHE Compliance

Jigsaw, the mindful approach to PSHE, provides complete coverage of all statutory Relationships Education and Health Education requirements through six carefully sequenced Puzzles (units) taught across the academic year. Learning is age-appropriate and builds progressively from Reception to Year 6.

Puzzle	When taught	Statutory coverage	Key RSHE Content
Being Me In My World	Autumn 1	Relationships Education, Health Education	Rights and responsibilities, help-seeking, trusted adults, boundaries, conflict resolution, citizenship, the UNCRC
Celebrating Difference	Autumn 2	Relationships Education	Family diversity (including same-sex parents), bullying prevention, protected characteristics, inclusion, challenging stereotypes
Dreams & Goals	Spring 1	Health Education	Self-esteem, resilience, mental wellbeing, healthy lifestyle choices, financial literacy, online safety, water safety
Healthy Me	Spring 2	Health Education	Physical health, substance awareness (smoking, vaping, alcohol), safety education (road, rail, water, fire), first aid, mental health
Relationships	Summer 1	Relationships Education	Families, friendships, personal boundaries, online relationships, recognising unhealthy relationships, support networks
Changing Me	Summer 2	Health Education	Life cycles, body parts, puberty, menstruation, body image, conception and birth (optional)
Changing Me	<i>Summer 2</i>	<i>Non Statutory, recommended Sex Education</i>	<i>Ages 9-10, Piece 4 - Conception Ages 10-11, Piece 3 - Babies: Conception to Birth</i>

Complete statutory coverage Every requirement from the DfE's 2025 RSHE guidance is addressed within the programme. Further detailed mapping documents show exactly where each statutory outcome is covered.

Age-appropriate progression Content builds year on year. Children revisit key themes with increasing depth and complexity, ensuring they are prepared for each stage of development.

Flexibility for schools Sex Education content (conception and birth) is clearly separated from statutory Health Education, allowing schools to teach it within PSHE (where parental withdrawal applies) or signpost to Science curriculum.

Safeguarding embedded throughout Help-seeking, trusted adults, and recognising unsafe situations are woven through all six Puzzles

Inclusive by design Family diversity, protected characteristics, and respect for difference are integrated naturally across the programme, meeting Equality Act 2010 requirements.

2026 updates included New statutory content on safety education, online safety, vaping and nicotine pouches, news anxiety, and financial literacy is fully incorporated and continues to be kept up to date with emerging guidance and research.

Supporting Your Implementation

Jigsaw provides everything needed to deliver RSHE confidently and compliantly:

- **Statutory mapping documents** – showing precisely where each DfE outcome is addressed
- **Parent-facing materials** – letters, guides, and presentation slides for parent consultations
- **Staff CPD resources** – training materials to build teacher confidence
- **Policy templates** – customisable RSE policy aligned to statutory requirements
- **Ongoing support** – network meetings, webinars, and access to the Jigsaw Community Area

For more information:

Website: [Jigsaw - Leading provider of PSHE & RE education](https://www.jigsaweducationgroup.com)

Call: +44 (0)3331 882133)

E-mail: SchoolSupport@jigsaweducationgroup.com